

# The mediating role of e-assessment on student identity: A sociocultural analysis through the lens of figured worlds

Meg Westbury

PhD student in E-Research and Technology Enhanced Learning (Lancaster University)

## Introduction & Framework

- Turnitin is text-matching software used by most UK universities to combat cut-and-paste plagiarism. It produces 'originality reports' showing percentages of text matched in its database
- How do students' interpretations of Turnitin's reports affect their identities as learners? **Can this tell us something interesting about offering assessment in digital formats?**
- I used Holland et al.'s (1998) theory of dynamic and negotiated identity formation which relies heavily on Lave and Wenger (1991), but also L. S. Vygotsky's theory of **artefact use** and its role in shaping human subjectivities. Specifically, I used Holland et al.'s notion of 'figured worlds' which are individuals' assumptions about the world and greatly patterned through artefact use

## Methodology & Methods

- I used case study methodology (Creswell, 2013) to define the local activity setting, i.e., the context in which students' negotiate their identities as learners
- I conducted semi-structured interviews with two students (E and S) who are undergraduates in a university department that offers Turnitin for formative purposes
- I analyzed the data using a form of discourse analysis developed by Gee (2014), especially his tools for exploring identity and figured worlds
- I specifically looked for students' assumptions about what is 'normal' (their figured world) and how this affects their subjectivities

## Results

Two figured worlds and two mediated identities emerged from my analysis:

### 1. Figured World 1: You Are at University to Work Hard

"Because my work load is so much heavier than at a lot of other universities, you have to make that sacrifice." (E) "I quite like to, you know, be as productive as possible. So I try to squeeze as much out of every hour as I can." (S)

### 2. Figured World 2: Plagiarism Is Something That Happens Elsewhere

"I think especially at a place like X, plagiarism is such an infrequent occurrence because everyone's here, or most people are, on merit." (E) "Generally, I haven't had issues with plagiarism." (S)

### 3. Mediation 1: Turnitin Judges Me Accurately

"I think that a computer scoring you on various aspects of your writing is, indeed, a useful tool. It just seems to be a computer response that was very mathematical in its processing." (E) "I'm more comfortable with the computer making actual decisions which can't be disputed." (S)

### 4. Mediation 2: Turnitin Confirms I Am a Good Worker

"I was pretty satisfied that my method of working was appropriate and wasn't getting picked up for whatever reasons. It seemed to be effective for me." (E) "Knowing that Turnitin would take care of my coursework was a kind of certainty in a pool of very little certainty." (S)

## Conclusions

- The students' figured world is one of an ethical community of scholars where hard work and sacrifices are highly prized
- The students used Turnitin's originality reports to confirm, via Turnitin's neutral and 'mathematical processing,' their places in this community
- **Hence, the reports were artefacts that mediated the students' culturally-situated, negotiated identities**
- The students' perception of Turnitin's objectivity and computer-based precision led them to embrace and feel empowered by its results
- But it is easy to imagine how, in a different context, students might perceive the reports more negatively
- ICTs, therefore, are never deployed in value-free contexts. How they are received and their consequences, intended or not, are not predictable

## Literature Cited

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## Contact Information

This pilot study was done as part of the PhD programme in E-Research and Technology Enhanced Learning at Lancaster University. Please direct questions to [meg@westbury.io](mailto:meg@westbury.io) or @MegWestbury (Twitter)

